

Liberty Hall, site
Rock Hall

from Rock Hall Historical Collection '57, pp. 10-11.

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James' son, "The Honorable" James, became the owner of "Liberty Hall," married Mary Hanson Ringgold, and died in 1832.

A monument erected in 1888 in St. Paul's churchyard reads,

Five Generations of Hodges of "Liberty Hall"
are buried here, represented by:

William Hodges	died	1697
Robert Hodges	died	1735
James Hodges	died	1816
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Removed in 1888 from the family burying
ground of the old homestead by their lineal
descendants James Hodges and Robert Hodges
of Baltimore.

It is probable that the old house met the fate of so many others, and succumbed to the stormy inroads of the bay and its tributaries about the time the monument was erected.[*] Of the old mansion nothing remains, but according to local tradition a few bricks can be seen at low tide under the shallow waters of Huntingfield Creek.

The Hodges Arms were: "Or, three crescents sable, on a canton of the second, a ducal crown of the first." The crest was "out of a ducal coronet or, an heraldic antelope's head argent, horned and tufted bold." The family motto was "Dant Lucem Crescentibus Orti." Liberty Hall Farm is presently owned by Mr. Henry W. Young.

*Liberty Hall does not appear on either the 1860 or 1877 maps of the county.

half of Eastern Neck, extending from the western shore to Gray's Inn Creek, and including the site of New Yarmouth.

Thomas Ringgold was one of the early pioneers and won for himself the honor and respect of his early contemporaries.

The records show that on December 2, 1661 he secured to his two sons John and James Ringgold "one half of my land called 'Huntingfield'". Later, two hundred acres, known as "Greenbranch" were added, and still later four hundred acres known as "Middle Spring". John Ringgold died in 1672 and James came into possession of the entire Huntingfield tract.

Major James Ringgold, son of the original grantee, was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Kent County, serving with Captain Robert Vaughan, William Coursey, Thomas Broadno, Seth Forster and William Leeds. This position was an important one, and the members of the "quorum" are said to have worn wig and ermine similar to those worn by Justices of England.

Several years later, in 1674, James Ringgold served on the Committee of the Commission for Peace for Cecil County (the boundary lines as we know them today were not set up until much later) with Thomas Howell, Nathaniel Stiles, John Vanheck, Augustine Herrman, Henry Ward, John Gilbert, Abraham Will, Joseph Wickes and Thomas South.

Later, in the same year, a new "Commission of Peace" for each of the counties was named; those for Kent being Major Joseph Wickes, Thomas South, James Ringgold, John Hynson, Henry Hozier, Arthur Wright, Tobias Wells and William Lawrence. On the back of the paper authorizing this new Commission it was ordered that the place for holding county courts be in some place on Eastern Neck and not upon the Island as formerly.

Major James Ringgold was married twice, his second wife being Mary, daughter of Captain Robert Vaughan.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that the County Militia, first set up in the late seventeenth century, was generous in dispensing high-sounding titles, like Lieutenant, Captain, Major and Colonel. This explains why so many of the Kent County justices and sheriffs had military rank -- Major Joseph Wickes, Captain Thomas Hynson, Colonel Thomas Ringgold, to name a few.

A further account of Major Ringgold and the part he played in the founding of New Yarmouth will be found elsewhere in this volume.

The land that was granted to the Ringolds has been divided, until now at least seven large farms are found within its confines -- Ellendale, Huntingfield, The Hermitage, Napley Green, Wildwood, Church Creek Farm, and The Point Farm.

The present owner of Huntingfield Farm is Mr. Grellet N. Collins.

ELLENDALE

Ellendale, long a landmark on Eastern Neck, has succumbed to erosion from the waters of the Chester River, and has lately been razed altogether. Part of the original Huntingfield grant to Thomas Ringgold in 1650, the house was built in 1722. Glazed headers marked the date on the east gable. The house was one and a half stories high, with much fine paneling in the interior. The upper part of the house was destroyed by fire in 1850, and rebuilt in wood.

An interesting account of Ellendale in the early years says:

"From many places the sporting gentry gathered here to enjoy the races held on the race course extending from the house to the bay. This quarter mile course then gave ample room to 'Wheel and Turn', but now the waves have washed the shore to such an extent that but little of the track is left, and in a severe storm the spray will dash against the western walls of the house.

"On one end of the farm were the salt works where the plantation produced its own salt from the waters of the Chesapeake during the war with England. Below the house were the tan vats where leather was tanned at the same period to make the boots and shoes needed on the plantation.

"On one occasion a coffin washed out of a brick grave



Ellendale (about 1930)

near the site of this old house and the then owner notified the Ringolds of Kent Island, one of whom, a very old man, came over and claimed the remains as those of his mother. This Mr. Ringgold had the coffin, which was in a good state of preservation, opened and found only dust and bones, but the magnificent hair of the occupant was in a fine state of preservation and still coiled and fastened up with silver hairpins. He removed the remains to his own home for final interment.

"Many ancient gravestones have been found on this historic place, one of which dated back to 1656, and another to 1707, and quite a number which were placed over the graves of those who died prior to 1800."

Ellendale is the property of Mrs. Harry Esenwein.

NAPLEY GREEN

Napley Green on a high bluff overlooking Gray's Inn Creek was part of the original Ringgold Huntingfield tract. It appears as Knapley Green in 1718 in Kent County land records. A huge fireplace and inside pyramid chimney remain in the present modernized structure, and nearby a simple cabin has been preserved that might have housed slaves. Napley Green is now owned by Mr. Eugene E. duPont.

LIBERTY HALL

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Passing along the shore line from Eastern Neck, through the town of Rock Hall, the next group of old houses are strung along the shores of Swan and Tavern Creeks.

Swan Point, a sandy peninsula on the bay side of Swan Creek, acquired its name from the hordes of swan which used to winter on the creek. Though in lesser numbers now, they may still be seen riding the icy waters.

Captain John Smith touched on the point on his voyage into the Chesapeake in 1608. In his "General Historie of Virginia" he calls it "Bourne Point". In 1659 Swan Point or Island was mentioned frequently in contemporary records. Later the creek was referred to as "Swan Island Creek" (1662) and finally in 1667 as "Swan Creek". It is marked as Swan Point on the Augustine Herrman map, reproduced elsewhere in this volume.

One of Kent's earliest roads led from Eastern Neck to Swan Point. Kent County records show that in 1675 Cornelius Comegys was appointed "Overseer for ye highways of Langford's Bay Hundred and yt he make cleare a road from Richard Joanes his house to Swan Creeke road".

Swan Creek Hundred was among the earliest hundreds mentioned in court records, and Milford Town was directed to be laid out on its banks in 1686. Although there remains no trace of such a town, a grist mill was standing in 1724 on land called "Milford".

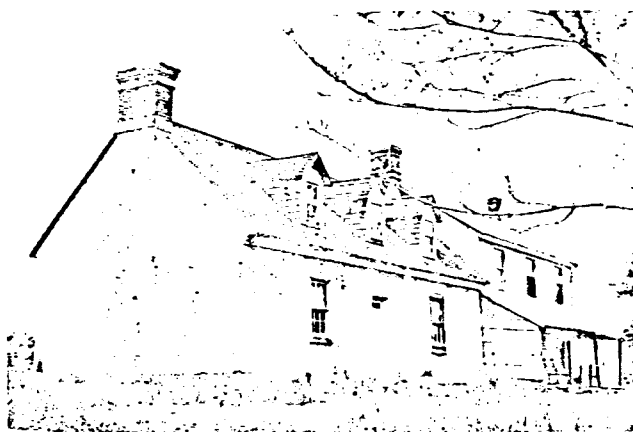
Swan Creek was the scene of a brutal Indian massacre in the fall of 1663.

Taverns, or ordinaries, as they were called in the 17th century, were fairly numerous. Chronic drinking was too widespread at that time to amount to a vice, despite penalties for the offense. Little could be done in the face of the poor examples set by some of the court justices and other public functionaries. "Tavern Creek is no doubt named for an ancient tavern that stood on Swan Point where this creek cuts into it."

The creek was first mentioned in 1682 with the acquisition of 100 acres of "Rusmore" by Robert Neeves.

BOXLEY

On land "laid out for John Scott as by patent" on the eastern-most side of Swan Creek, stands Boxley, a one and a half story house with steeply pitched roof, the bricks laid in Flemish bond with glazed headers. The chimneys at each gable end also show interesting brick detail. 300 acres of the original tract were sold in 1672 to Lawrence



Boxley

Symonds and William Davis, and by them to Ebenezer Blackiston in 1674. The house was long the home of the Blackistons. Boxley is now owned by Mr. Herman Hill.

WILLIAM'S VENTURE

One hundred and fourteen acres on Swan Creek were patented to William Bradshaw in 1725, being partly land that had been granted as Smith's Range in 1663 to James Smith, and The Addition to John Floyd in 1667, and returned to Lord Baltimore as these two men had died without heirs.

William Bradsha (without the w) willed in 1753 part of his estate to his daughter Frances, who married William Hodges in 1736. This William Hodges was the second son of the first William Hodges of "Liberty Hall". Apparently



William's Venture

the place was owned, or lived in, by two sons of Col. James Hodges of "Liberty Hall" in 1783, and probably for this reason has been mistakenly thought by some authorities to be "Liberty Hall" itself.

The portion of William's Venture and the Bradshaw Farm on which the house and wharf now stand was purchased by John Humphreys in 1806, "commonly called 'The Point'" and appears after this as Humphrey's Point or Page's Point. The gravestone of John Humphrey's wife Ann, who died in 1820, was found on the property.

The house originally had a steeply pitched roof and cellar way at the north gable, and was one and a half stories high with probably a narrow steep stair leading to the upper chambers. The roof was raised to afford more space on the second floor, probably in the 18th century, since the mahogany stair and paneling appear to date from that period. An unusual feature in the plan is the combining of Living Room and Stair Hall into one room (the original Great Room has been combined with the Living Room by the present owners). The paneling around the fireplace wall, the recessed paneled windows, and the mahogany staircase and paneling are intact, and the pine floors also. HL hinges were found throughout the house but the locks are restorations. The new wood wing is the fifth one to be built onto the brick house, and follows the marks of an earlier one. The present owners are Mr. and Mrs. Berthold Bothe.

SPRINGFIELD FARM

Springfield Farm stands at the head waters of Swan Creek. The wooden portion is thought to have been built in 1698, and the brick addition dates from 1770. This date is shown laid in bricks in one of the side walls. The original design and building was done by Benjamin Ricaud, and shows French influence in the paneling and other features. Some of the paneling and mantels have been restored. In one corner of the living room is a replica of the original corner cupboard, filled with china in the English Sprig pattern, matched from a few broken pieces found buried in the backyard. The stair case and several of the wooden floors are original. Mice had gnawed so badly at the corners of the doors that "cat corners" were cut on the edges. The brick floor in the dining room and the kitchen, the brick patio and outdoor fireplace, were made from old bricks from the streets of Chestertown.

* Liberty Hall does not appear in either 1860 or 1877 maps.

absorbed into the community of Rock Hall. The actual founding of Rock Hall, according to most historians, took place in 1707.

In the days that followed 1707 the community of Rock Hall was destined to form an important link and play an important role in the development of Kent County. It was to become the permanent settlement of lower Kent County. The early history, entwined with early land grants and homes of distinction, forms an interesting study of a small segment of early America.

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF ROCK HALL

The actual founding of Rock Hall is obscured by several other settlements in the same general area. The lower end of Kent County was settled as early as 1630. During this early period Kent Island was included within the boundaries of the county. It was here that Captain William Claiborne settled sometime between 1629 and 1631. The county is the oldest on the Eastern Shore and the second oldest in the State of Maryland. It can boast, to have in operation, the oldest organized government in the State.

The first known community settlement may be traced back to 1675. It was then that Samuel Tovey leased a tract of 100 acres of land from Major James Ringgold for the erection of a town. Earlier settlement may be traced back to Ringgold himself. He left Kent Island and set up residence in the Eastern Neck area about 1650.

Then in 1683, the general assembly passed an act making provisions for the establishment of another town to be known as New Milford. This proposed community was designated as a port of entry and was to be located at Swan Creek on the land of William Stanley. There is no record of actual establishment of New Milford, nor is there any evidence of its existence.

The boundaries of Kent County, establishing its present limits, were designated by act of legislature in 1706. The new boundaries became effective on the 1st of May, 1707. Most sources agree that it was during this same year that Rock Hall was founded. The anniversary edition of the Kent County News, Fred G. Usilton, Robert L. Swain, Jr. and the Maryland Writers Project all agree that Rock Hall was founded in 1707.

The community probably started as a home for fishermen. It is believed that released indentured servants would settle near the waterfront and live in crudely constructed shanties. The early importance of Rock Hall centered around the enterprises of Captain Thomas Harris. He purchased a tract of land bordering the harbor which extended from the present town limits to Gratitude and south to Green Lane.

Captain Harris' boats were used to haul grain in the early days. At times they were loaded at the Rock Hall wharf and at other times drew up to the sites of farms where the grain was grown. He operated two freight boats, the LEVANT and the THOMAS HARRIS.

Nathan Roberts Satterfield, one of Rock Hall's early citizens, was said to have recalled the shipbuilding enterprise of Captain Harris, his boats, and his big house on the rock foundations. This is believed by many to have been the building from which Rock Hall derived its name. The historic marker erected by citizens states that the town was named for the Rock Hall Mansion which was supposed to have been located near the landing. This theory has been discounted by the fact that there is no known source of stone in the local area. It is interesting, however, to observe the contents of the last will and testament of Samuel A. J. Wickes. The will prepared in 1865 mentions two stone houses among his holdings. While those two houses are not located in the general area of the landing, it would indicate that stone had been used for the construction of some of the earlier homes.

The importance of Rock Hall in the early days seems to center around the Harris establishment. It is believed that it was here that the early ferry terminal was located. This terminal was linked to the oldest turnpike in America. This transfer point provides the setting for a stopping point of many famous travelers. Mrs. S. M. Crosby, a local historian, found that Mr. Satterfield remembered that vessels from Annapolis used to come to Captain Harris' wharf. He recalled one to be the schooner JOHN BARBER. He repeatedly heard other people say that it was

to Harris' that Washington came and was provided with conveyance, horses, and food. He also recalled that his mother used to tell of a day, when a young girl, while she was waiting to board the "Express" for Baltimore, heard other prospective passengers moving about in the room speak of times when Washington had been in the same room.

Rock Hall, in the early days, appears to have been confined to the settlement at the landing and the "crossroads". The "crossroads", was the junction between the landing, Eastern Neck, and the connecting link to the old post road.

New Yarmouth had once been the important settlement in this part of the county. As late as 1763, the Maryland General Assembly provided for tobacco inspection at a public warehouse located at the late Samuel Tovey's or Gray's Inn Creek. The site of New Yarmouth, while no longer known by that name, appears to have been used as a settlement for several years. A location map of 1877, shows a concentration of homes and business locations in the Gray's Inn Creek vicinity. On March 6, 1840, the post office was moved below Rock Hall and the name was changed to Eastern Neck. It remained there for two years and was returned to Rock Hall in 1842. Early maps and business records also show that Edesville had been a place of prominence during the 1877 period.

With the introduction of the American railroad system and the reduction in the importance of shipping by water, the development of the lower end of the county diminished. A railroad had once been proposed but failed to materialize.

From its early period of mobility, the lower county settlement finally found a permanent site when Rock Hall incorporated within the present boundaries in 1908. While still a scattered community, the hub of Rock Hall now revolves around the old "Crossroads" section. It has grown and developed rapidly in recent years. Today, here is the center for some small industry, a land of sportsmen, a vacation land, and the center of a thriving seafood industry.

HISTORY OF OLD HOMES

A glance at a map of the area near Rock Hall shows clearly that water transportation strongly influenced the majority of early settlers in this vicinity.

From the tip of Eastern Neck Island, up Eastern Neck from across the mouth of the Chester River where it empties into Chesapeake Bay, up Swan and Tavern Creeks, along Swan Point, stretching up to the bluffs of Tolchester, and on the Eastern side of the long peninsula extending up Langford Bay, the coastline is typically indented with coves and creeks. Time has dealt sometimes gently, sometime roughly, with the many old brick homes built by early settlers on these coves and creeks.

In some cases the houses stand almost unaltered, in others changes have rendered them almost unrecognizable and in still others the site alone is marked.

Of the three general styles of architecture found in Tidewater Maryland: the Medieval, the Transitional and the later Georgian -- most of these dwellings belong to the Transitional era, with traces of the Medieval influence often persisting.

A distinct style, called the "Lankford Bay" type, dating from the middle Eighteenth century, is typically a two story house with low kitchen wing on one side; chimney at each gable end, often flush with the wall. Often the date of erection is written in glazed black header bricks on the open gable end. This gable frequently features small high square windows flanking the chimney, and

1a. Location Map of Old Houses

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Mitchell House | 16. Ellendale |
| 2. Caulk's Field House | 17. Trumpington |
| 3. Gresham Hall | 18. Ingleside |
| 4. Hinchingham | 19. Spencer Hall |
| 5. Springfield | 20. Site of Wickliffe |
| 6. Hinchingham Farm | 21. Napley Green |
| 7. Miller Farm | 22. Site of New Yarmouth |
| 8. Driftwood | 23. Wesley Chapel |
| 9. House on Swan Creek | 24. My Lord's Gift |
| 10. Tavern Creek House | 25. Bungay |
| 11. Rosedale | 26. Kimbolton |
| 12. William's Venture | 27. Rees' Corner House |
| 13. Boxley | 28. Broadnox |
| 14. Site of Liberty Hall K-313 | 29. St. Paul's Church |
| 15. Huntingfield | 30. Ringgold's Fortune |

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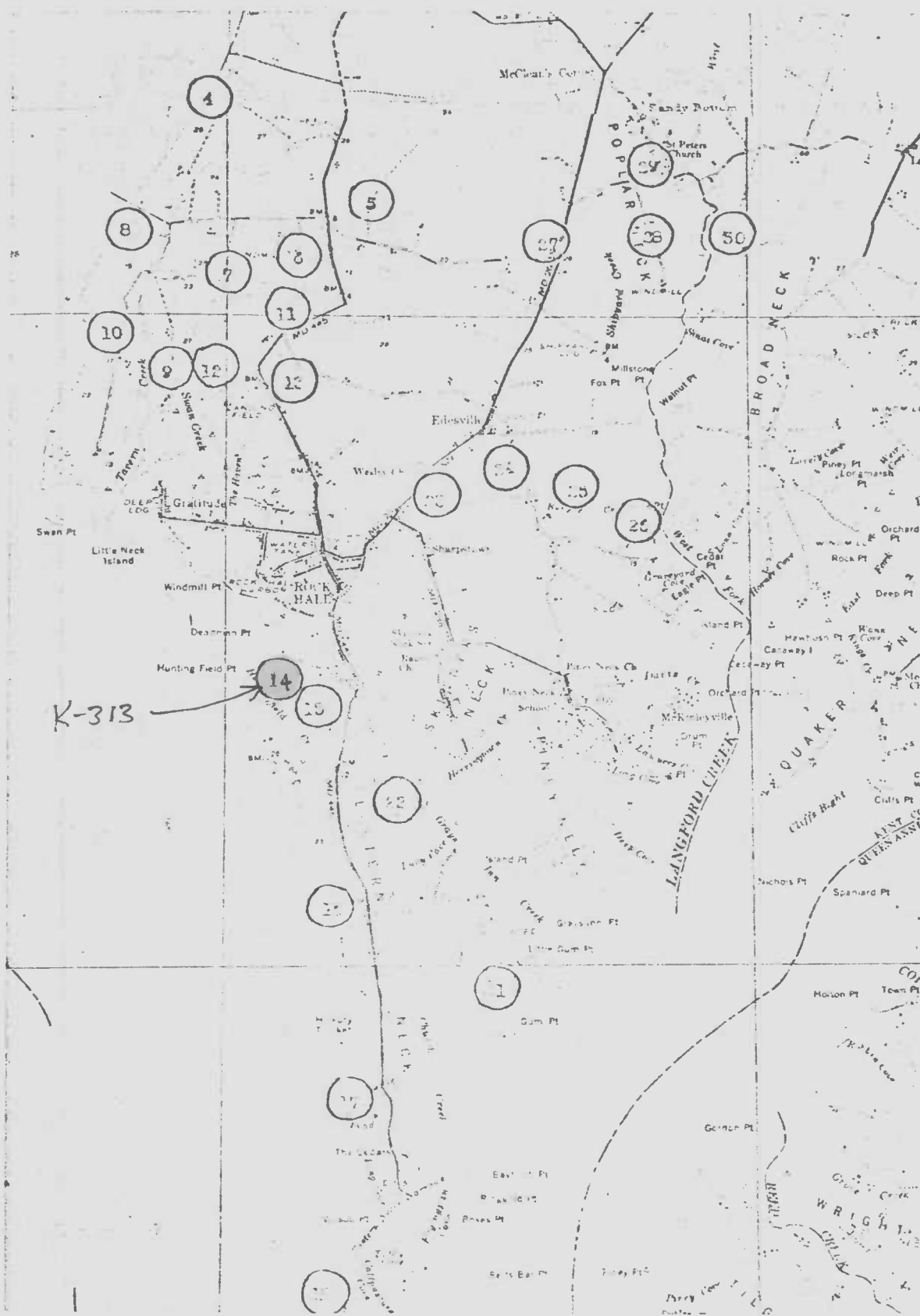
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